Characters

- TEDDY
- IRENE

Act

SCENE TEDDY'S *apartment. An overdone room ... too much crystal, too many telephones and jacks, figurines, satiny, over-stuffed furniture ... ostentatious display of all the expensive junk and gadgetry that money can buy. The place is overneat and well-kept*.

TIME. *Fall--1969. The sound of African bells and stringed instruments ... fading into a telephone ringing. The phone rings through the sound of shower water running*. TEDDY *enters ... fortyish, black, and roughly good-looking. He is dripping wet, wears a terry-cloth robe and a man's shower cap*.

TEDDY

Hello? ... I'm catchin double pneumonia. Who's callin? Yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm getting ready. Yeah, yeah, I'm late. A half hour late. Baby, you always measurin time. The Chinese people ... listen now ... the Chinese people ... I'm giving you a fact ... the Chinese people got a tradition ... leisurely livin ... you get there when you get there, Okay, all right, I apologize. Now, the reason you always measurin time is cause you a Got-dam-white-Anglo-Saxon-Protes-tant-American. Yall woulda held a stop-watch on God-all-mighty ... Never woulda give him no seven damn days to make the world ... cause you too fuckin impatient. I did apologize ... in front. Okay, I apologize some more ... No, I don't get no kick outta buggin you. You buggin your damn self. Wait, hold on. If your momma's in town, you *oughtta* be with her ... *should* be with her, playin tiddley-winks or canasta or whatever other ass-draggin games you white folks like to play

(*laughs*) .

Ahhhhhhha ... Aw, baby, I ain't callin you white folks, you wild, yaller-headed, fine thing, you! They all white folks *but* you ... you somethin else. I'll be there. How I'm gonna get there if you keep talkin? Berniece, Berniece ... keep cool ... Aw, you sweet, vanilla ice-cream cone, you. Dammit, Berniece, I'm ketchin cold ... Yeah, yeah, soon as I can

(*hangs up phone*) .

Women, women.

(*looks in the mirror and gently removes the shower cap*)

Aw, you good-lookin, black, heart-breakin, son-of-a-bitch, whoo!

(*Phone rings again. He picks it up*.)

Berniece ... whats-a-matta with you ... Oh, yeah, yeah, right back at you, man. What you know? ... Chicago? You tell Gut Wilson I ain't lost nothin in Chicago. New York's my hole card. Trouble with Gut Wilson is Gut's a liar. Lotta big talk, but when you get there nothin is happenin. How come he didn't call me hisself ... Yeah, sure, he got you to do it and don't I know why. The last time he called about a big game, I got there, nothin was happenin. Yeah, had me takin off for Tampa, Florida, in a jet plane, nothin there but a lotta peanut guys and chili-parlor pimps with fifty or a hundred dollars apiece, all of em hopin to luck up on a few grand by hittin on me. What you call killin time. Business is business, after all. How is ole, ugly Gut? They tell me his ole lady shot him square in the ass!

(*laughs*)

Took the doctor a week fore he could find the bullet. Ole, four-flushin, tub-a-lard. But he's all right. Tell him um sorry I can't make it ... Yeah, man, right back at you, you take it easy too.

(*hangs up*)

Chicago, shit.

(*He turns on the radio to cool jazz and exits to the bedroom*, IRENE *opens the front door with her key. She is a brown woman, a little older than* TEDDY *... wearing a mink coat, a very ordinary blouse and skirt ... comfort shoes. She is neat but looks a bit thrown together. She is carrying several packages and a suitcase. TEDDY, from off-stage*)

Who's that?

IRENE

Who the hell you think, nigger? How many people got keys to this door?

TEDDY

Irene? That you, Irene?

IRENE

Yeah, Irene. Not Mary or Susie, or Helen or Miss Ann or Aunt Jemima either. Did I leave anybody out? Who else is here?

(*rests her packages and coat*)

I couldn't find no parkin space and had to bribe the garage fella to let me in. What the hell is the matter with New York City! Traffic bumper to bumper. I brought you presents ... and you don't deserve a damn one ... not a one. Who else is here?

TEDDY

Not a soul, baby!

IRENE

Where you?

TEDDY

In here dressin.

IRENE

(*surveying the room with hostility*) .

Did that Berniece pick out your new drapes?

TEDDY

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

IRENE

I don't like um.

TEDDY

Okay!

IRENE

(*smooths her hair and goes around the room, looking into cigarette boxes, straightening chairs, etc˙*) .

I don't like the color. They cheap lookin too.

TEDDY

All right, darlin.

IRENE

Fact is ... I don't like nothin about um. Lotta simple-minded bad taste.

TEDDY

I hear you, sugar.

IRENE

Damn, I sure wish youda told me you was gonna buy new drapes.

TEDDY

I wish so too, baby-doll, I really do. Whatcha lookin for out there?

IRENE

(*opening the liquor cabinet*) .

Gettin me a drink.

TEDDY

You kiddin.

IRENE

No, I'm not.

(*pours a small drink and steps out of her shoes*)

Life is a dog. This life is somethin. Ain't one thing ... it's another.

(*Garbled announcement comes over radio*.)

Mmmmmmm, well, how bout that. Hey, Teddy! They passed some kinda civil rights!

TEDDY

Did what?

IRENE

(*yelling*)

I say they passed some kinda civil rights!

TEDDY

What was it?

IRENE

I don't know but whatever it was ... it got passed.

TEDDY

Don't make me no damn difference!

IRENE

Well, it don't make me none either, but it's still nice. It's nice for those it make a difference to. It's nice for anybody whose taste runs in that direction. That's what I mean.

TEDDY

(*enters wearing a splendid dark suit, pleated, white shirt ... tie with pearl stickpin. He is fastening a cuff link*) .

A lotta crap, alla that prayin and crawlin all over the ground, kneelin whilst the police dogs be snappin at your ass. Singin while whitey throw tear gas. You lost your mind or somethin? Carryin on bout "civil rights."

IRENE

But if somebody's taste run in that direction, then ... dammit ... civil rights is their bag ... that's all I say.

TEDDY

You losin your mind?

IRENE

The civil rights don't mean a father-grabbin thing to me. But to some people it do. Why you got to jump me about it?

TEDDY

Reenie, you sick? You don't sound like yourself.

IRENE

Why you jumpin your own kind? You don't like the civil rights ... kill me! Hell, it's all my fault, huh?

TEDDY

No, baby, all I'm sayin is you don't have to go through alla that just to eat at some dirty, greasy hamburger joint.

IRENE

I'm with you. But some feel our way and some don't ... and all ain't fools, dammit-to-hell. Don't you mess with me, Teddy, not today.

TEDDY

(*wondering about her attitude*)

Guess you right, Irenc. Make yourself comfortable. I got a little run to make.

IRENE

Where you goin?

TEDDY

Gotta go see a fella name Shorty ... bout settin up a poker session for me.

IRENE

(*looking over his outfit*)

Mmmm. Shorty must be a flyin faggot ... way you all got up.

TEDDY

Don't gimmie a hard time. Where's my present?

IRENE

In that box. Don't go way and leave me, Teddy. Talk to me.

TEDDY

Business is business, baby. I ain't seen you for a couple months, you drop in unexpected. After all, I didn't know you were comin. Tell you what ... I'll be gone for two hours ... then be right back and talk to you. Okay?

IRENE

No. Stay here with me awhile ... then go on and see Berniece or whoever. How is Berniece?

TEDDY

Still her same, simple self.

IRENE

She's all right, I guess ... Don't leave me.

TEDDY

(*picks up the mink coat and strokes it. He is uneasy about her attitude*)

Mink ... mink ... alla this pretty mink. Go girl.

IRENE

Aw ... ain't nothin but a animal's backside. They knock them in the head and slit their throat and sew em together ... Who the hell cares.

TEDDY

You the one bought it.

IRENE

I bought it off a junky. He was shiverin and shakin from head to toe ... like at the North Pole ... I gave him three hundred and fifty dollars. I ain't never enjoyed that coat ... keep seein him shiverin and shakin ... needin a fix.

TEDDY

Reenie, you didn't sell him the junk, you didn't make him take it.

IRENE

But I know be had to lift that to buy junk ... had to boost it and sell it to me to keep his habit goin.

TEDDY

Well, damn, look what they did to the mink ... knocked him in the head and slit his throat ... and all like you say. That's life.

IRENE

You make me feel better. Don't go out.

TEDDY

You unreasonable, baby. I'd do anything in the world for you ... you my buddy-girl, you know that. Ain't you my buddy-girl?

IRENE

No, I'm your wife. Well, anyway ... your divorced wife. I'm the only wife you ever had.

TEDDY

(*gets a dark trench coat from closet, examines it for any stray piece of lint which might be found; of course it is lintless*)

Why you wanta throw that in my face? You say ... "I wanta be married ... marry me." I married you ... didn't

see you no more for a year and a half ... then you pop up with some paper ... you want a divorce. I sign the paper. There's somethin about a colored woman that makes her a self-willed, non-under-standable; but I been your buddy-boy through it all. Now I'm gonna cut my little run down to a hour or forty-five minutes ... then I be right back ...

(*He has one arm in the coat*.)

IRENE

When I first met you ... you wasn't nothin but a dinin car waiter.

TEDDY

(*pauses*)

Right.

IRENE

I taught you just about everything you know.

TEDDY

Just about, almost.

IRENE

I set you up in business ... bought you a number wheel .. showed you where it was at ... and I never asked much in return.

(*He now has the coat on*.)

I say don't go out ... don't go out, dammit ... I say that ... don't go out!

TEDDY

(*sits down but still wears coat*)

I'm still here. Now tell me what you was doin when I met you.

IRENE

I got a good memory. I was attendant in the ofay ladies lounge ... washin toilets, handin out toilet paper ... A little saucer of change on the dressin table ... a sign pasted on the mirror ... " *Ladies, your tips are my livelihood*" ... "Towel, honey?" Pinnin up torn dress hems, wipin up the floor behind sick drunks ... laughin at their "Jew" and "darky" jokes, wipin away their tears. Each one of em tellin me how much they loved the colored woman who raised em or cook die meals or whatever, tellin me how I must or must not feel about the race problem ... and how I must not hate ... The same jokes, the same advice from one damn rest room to another. Rest room attendant!

TEDDY

Yeah, well ... I'm not soundin on you ... even though you was the one soundin first. We been through some hard days together. Reenie, all that you ever did for me ... I tried to thank you

(*looks at her suitcase*) .

IRENE

I'm gonna camp here for a couple of days.

TEDDY

Crazy. How is Philadelphia?

IRENE

That's one sad-ass city ... bout to sink into the ground ... but a little money is changin hands now and then. You don't come to see me like you used to.

TEDDY

Aw, you know, first one thing then another

(*leans over the back of her chair and presses his cheek to hers*) .

What you know? Sweet thing.

IRENE

Don't know. What you know, daddy? You good-lookin, two-timin, black, sweet-lovin-man, you.

TEDDY

Welcome home, it's been a long time.

IRENE

So good to hear the sounda your voice.

TEDDY

I've broken three dates with Berniece.

IRENE

What I care? Make it four ... she'll forgive you. Call her and say something came up. If I ain't somethin, what is? I'm bein bad about it.

TEDDY

(*unbuttons coat*)

I'm still here. You in some kinda trouble?

IRENE

Those damn doctors, what the hell they know. I gotta go in the hospital next Monday ... God knows what all they plannin, but I said to myself ... I'm goin to see my buddy-boy first, no matter what.

TEDDY

Somethin serious? They say it's serious?

IRENE

Yes, serious, and don't make me name it ... gives me the creeps.

TEDDY

Oh ... well, you can't really know bout these things till you take alla the tests.

IRENE

I took the tests and they gave me the results ... and it's serious. That's bout all I got to say on that.

TEDDY

Sweetheart, you know ... they got all kindsa things goin on now with these operations and what you call ... er, you call ...

IRENE

Radiation.

TEDDY

That's right. Radiation.

IRENE

Radiation therapy. I know that. I'm not plannin to curl up and die. Much as I been through in life ... live or die ... this ain nothin.

TEDDY

There you go ... everything's gonna end up happy ... just like a Sidney Potenay movie.

IRENE

Makes you think ... you get to summin up your whole life ... that is, after your first feelings. I was shook ... it shook me. I put up a good front ... brave, strong and cool ... but on the inside I was shook ... it shook me. I recall goin in the bathroom ... a place full of echoes ... there I was feelin light-headed in the middle of nowhere ... high up ... lookin down on myself. That must be how it feels to be a mountain climber, I'll bet. I leaned my head against the cold, tile wall ... it was yellow tile ... big, square, yellow tiles ... and I cried out the fullness of my feeling ... never cried like that before ... never in this life. I got scared that I'd never stop ... chokin and sobbin ... and wonderin if I was chicken-hearted. Well, it seemed forever ... but I stopped. They set the day for me to face the music ... next Monday. I kept thinkin bout you and me and any unfinished business we might have. So I got on the highway and here I am.

TEDDY

(*removing his coat*)

Thank you. I'm sure glad you thought about me. Glad you got here, too. This where you belong. We gonna see

this through together ... and everything's gonna end up a Sidney Potenay movie. To what hospital you goin?

IRENE

Back down in Philly. I'll write everything down for you.

TEDDY

Philly ... that where you wanta be?

IRENE

Yes. It's all one anyway ... no matter where. Stay with me.

TEDDY

(*hanging up his things and hers*)

You couldn't chase me out. I wanta be here with you ... I'm the one ... it's you and me.

IRENE

You've always been good to me ... most of the time ... except for once or twice ...

TEDDY

Reenie, why bring up the once or twice?

IRENE

You knocked me down once ... and my eye was swole ... I remember how you sapped me up somethin awful.

TEDDY

But why? Why would I do something like that? Think. What had you done?

IRENE

Not a thing ... that I can recall. I shoulda hollered for the law and had you hauled off to jail ... that's what.

TEDDY

You whipped on my girlfriend. You almost kill Sadie.

IRENE

Aw ... she was just puttin on.

TEDDY

Aw, no she wasn't. You hit her with a chair leg. And for what? You didn't have no right to mess with that poor girl.

IRENE

She got on my nerves.

TEDDY

You and me wasn't together. You busted that up ... yet you was always runnin down my women to pick a quarrel.

IRENE

Not all of em ... just the ones I didn't like.

TEDDY

But who did you ever like? Name one.

IRENE

Mmmmmmmmm, lemmie see ... You remember Sugar? I liked Sugar very much.

TEDDY

(*looking in her empty glass*)

You liked Sugar cause she was homely.

IRENE

Maybe you right ... Now tell me why *you* liked her. Maybe her beauty was not to be seen.

TEDDY

(*with a proud, self-conscious grin*) .

Aw, come on ... cut it out ... S'matter with you! How bout the time you hit me in the head with the apple juice bottle? ... The blood runnin down and had to have stitches ... look, look-a-there

(*kneels and leans his head in her lap*) .

IRENE

Oh, the hair don't even grow there no more.

(*She laughs*.)

I almost knocked you into the next world.

TEDDY

You a mean, old bitch ... just lookin at it gives you the jollies.

IRENE

You musta done somethin turble to aggravate me like that.

TEDDY

You done me awful.

IRENE

And you me.

TEDDY

You don't want another drink ... do you?

IRENE

Yes, I do. Mix one and hand it to me.

TEDDY

Okay, whatcha want?

IRENE

Don't make me no difference. Drink is a drink.

TEDDY

(*as he makes a fresh drink*)

Reenie, why did you make me marry you?

IRENE

How could I make you? You was a full-grown man.

TEDDY

That was the craziest thing. Why?

IRENE

I had my reasons.

TEDDY

Was about seventeen years ago.

IRENE

Eighteen.

TEDDY

"Teddy," you said ... "I want you to marry me cause every woman oughta be married one time." Two ... three weeks of cuttin up, lovin and laughin ... then bam! You cut out on me. Looka here ... still in the frame ... damn postcard from Adanta-damn-Georgia ...

(*He looks at framed card over the bar*.)

IRENE

(*reciting the message from memory*)

"Hey there, Teddy. Life is too short for you to be tied down ... or me either. Forget it ... Love ... Reenie."

TEDDY

One year later you come walkin in on me with a double order of barbecued ribs. I made you welcome ... glad to see you. There we was sittin in the kitchen eatin our ribs, havin one ha-ha after another ... and you say ... "Teddy, I gotta take you to court and charge you with adultery cause it's proper for the man to be the guilty one."

IRENE

That's why I liked Sugar so much! She was so gracious bout heipin' us out. Lord, yall looked funny when me and the witnesses knocked on the door. You had on a red satin robe and she was in my black lace nightie ... and the camera goin off ... yall was too funny. I still got one-a-them pictures somewhere. Look just like a Forty-second Street movie.

TEDDY

(*hands her the drink*)

When last you been to a movie, baby?

IRENE

I really don't remember.

TEDDY

They don't wear clothes in Forty-second Street movies. And people no longer got to bust into bedrooms to get a divorce.

IRENE

The world turns ... don't it?

TEDDY

"Let's get married, let's divorce." Why you do like that? Why?

IRENE

Teddy, did you ever love me?

TEDDY

You know it.

IRENE

Not that buddy-love ...

(*Phone rings*, TEDDY *picks it up*.)

TEDDY

Uh-huh, yeah, you right. I certainly do apologize. Listen ... I say *listen* ... this is a *bad* time. The wrong day. Well, I got a fella here and we goin over some Philadelphia business, try in to get somethin set up. No need to holler. Let's leave it that I'll call tomorrow and we make it definite. Aww, now, course I do. You know I do. Sure I do. Yeah, I know you do too.

(*smacks his lips to send a Kiss*) .

IRENE

Mmmmmmph ... nothin makes him sick

(*smacks her lips in imitation*.)

TEDDY

(*hangs phone up*)

Aw, why you wanta act ugly? Now ... what was we talkin about?

IRENE

Why did you marry me? You coulda said no.

TEDDY

I did it cause I thought that much of you.

(*He opens drawers of a chest*.)

Your things can go in here ... plenty space

(*opens the suitcase on a bench*)

. If marryin meant somethin to you I was glad to oblige. That's the same way I felt bout that damn fool divorce business. It was somethin you wanted and I could give it to you. Woman, I think a whole lotta you.

IRENE

(*suddenly solemn*)

Teddy, I want you to stay over there and keep unpackin that bag for me so I don't haveta look you in the face ... and I want you to listen good ... listen hard and let me say it all.

TEDDY

Right.

IRENE

The reason I asked you to be my husband was ... I wanted to have a baby ... and I wanted you for the father ... I didn't want the child to be outta wedlock ... I didn't think it was too much any of your business ... because you

didn't seem to love me like I loved you ... I went on off and had the baby ...

(*dead silence for a few seconds*) .

TEDDY

I don't believe you.

IRENE

It's true. We got a daughter. Her name used to be Teddi ... T-e-d-d-i. It was that for a few weeks.

TEDDY

What's her name now?

IRENE

I don't know.

TEDDY

Where is she?

IRENE

I ... I don't know ... truly I don't.

TEDDY

Why don't you know, Reenie?

IRENE

I got scared bout leavin her around here and there ... I got to bein sorry that I brought a child here who might be like us ... knocked about. The doctor saw how it was with my mind ...

TEDDY

Your mind?

IRENE

Felt like I was goin stone-crazy ... no sleep ... pacin the floor ... up and down, down and up. Such a pretty baby ... I was afraid I might hurt her ... Restbroken and pacin the floor and no way to turn ... I didn't want to hurt her.

TEDDY

You couldn't turn to me?

IRENE

No, somehow I couldn't. The doctor told me bout some folks who were well off ... "Professional," he said. Maybe a lawyer or another doctor ... or a teacher. I got to seein her in my mind's eye ... livin nicely and havin a

pretty home and a mama and a papa ... and bein proud of em ... Out of it, Teddy! free as black can be, free to get in some school, and live right. So I signed the papers and turned her over.

TEDDY

To who?

IRENE

They don't like you to know cause you might turn up and make trouble, They don't tell.

TEDDY

I'm sorry. We got a very sad story. Everytime I see you ... you be laughin and pokin fun at yourself ... always makin fun of yourself ...

IRENE

Just tryin to beat the next fella to it. If you laugh at yourself ... Well, that's how it was.

TEDDY

Is this her picture?

(*takes a framed picture out of case*)

IRENE

No. That's a baby picture of one of Martin Luther King's children. I cut it outta the *Ebony* magazine ... and framed it ... Just cause it's cute.

TEDDY

Sorry ... sorry to my heart. I'm sorry.

IRENE

I had to come and tell you, Teddy ... As hurtful as it is ... it's your business ... ain't nobody got the right to keep your business from you ... even if it's painful.

TEDDY

You right. At least it put your mind ... at rest.

IRENE

Oh, dear heart ... it ain't that easy. Instead of one child ... I had thousands. When she was two ... I looked at every two-year-old I passed ... "Is that her ... this one ... that one?" When she was five ... "There's one look just like Teddy." Years of lookin at strange, raggedy-ass children runnin round the streets ..."That her?" Gets worse as the years pass ... Now I look at some baby-face hooker standin on the corner with her mouth fulla that tough talk ... "Come on home with me, baby." I stand there wonderin ... "Is that my daughter?" The hooker see me starin and say ... "What you lookin at, bitch?"

TEDDY

(*trying to believe*)

That wasn't her. She's with some lawyer or schoolteacher. That's what ... a civil rights lawyer and his Wife.

IRENE

(*unpacking as he fixes drink for himself*)

I loved you so much, Teddy. I came here to let you know that much. I'm sorry I wasn't able to say it before. When we were around each other ... it was all fightin and pokin fun ... mockin our selves. I believe niggers think it's disgraceful to love one another ... fightin like hell to cover up what's in the heart. My daddy once said to mama ... "Sheeeeet ... what's love, what's that? Better git yourself some money." Sayin them things right in fronta me. I'm tryin to eat the little bitta grits and bacon and make out that I don't hear what I'm hearin. She say ... "Nigger, get the hell out." He slam the door and gone. She sit down and cry ... then look at me and say ... "Gal, you a millstone round my neck." Ain't like no Teevee story with us ... Love is hard to live round when a woman is washin out her last raggy pair-a-drawers ... and her man ain't got a quarter to put in her hand. When it's like that it's embarrassin to love each other ... If you stop laughin at yourself for too long a time ... they'll have to put you away in a straightjacket. I passed through this world ... and for what? I don't even know who I am.

TEDDY

You're my Irene. Don't let no damn-ass doctor crack you up. I'm gonna take you to another doctor who knows what he's talkin about ... and don't be handin people a lotta bad news. Our daughter is with a civil rights lawyer and his schoolteacher wife.

IRENE

How you know?

TEDDY

I'm the seventh child of a seventh child.

IRENE

(*shaking her head*)

You in the number business and I been dealin in the hot goods these junkies bring in. Why would our daughter be in a lawyer's home? Do we deserve it?

TEDDY

Cause I say. My papa didn't walk out on Mom, but I'm tellin you ... the family what's stayin together ... ain't always prayin together. Pop pulled garbage in a old-law tenement building. Hotdam ... every night after supper ... he drink down a pint a wine and say, "Come on, boy ... let's pull garbage." He's tanked, dig? I ain't had no wine cause I'm nine years old ... and stone sober. Open the dumbwaiter shaft ... great-day-in-the-mornin ... a big rat be walkin straight up the pulley rope ... Rat stop and look down on you like ... whatchoo want ...

(*imitating the rat*).

Then he walk *slower* ... actin like ... "Who you think you bluffin?" Pull garbage? We *shovelin* it out where folks pitch it down the shaft cause they scareda rats too. At night ... when I'm sleepin ... they runnin between the walls and the ceilin ... bloom-bloom-bloom. Rats on the run. That ain't no place for love talk bout

moonlight and butterflies and all that shit the white folks write stories bout. Openin up that stinkin, rotten garbage shaft took more heart than havin some damn "mutiny on the bounty"

(*freshening his drink because of the chilling memory*).

Them rats congregatin, baby, all along the basement steam pipes. Talkin bout werewolf and space saucer ... sheeeeet. Try pullin garbage.

IRENE

This liquor is strong.

TEDDY

Ain't strong enough ... whooo!

IRENE

(*placing gift boxes to one side. Shaking out chiffon nightie from the suitcase. She is slightly feeling the liquor*)

Over halfa my life spent in white folks' toilets, smellin their funk and grinnin in their face ... what for? To hear the sound of a quarter hittin against a saucer. Bible say you got threescore and ten years to live ... right?

TEDDY

Right.

IRENE

Some ain't got that ... and some got a few more. Whatcha doin with these precious days, Teddy?

TEDDY

Don't go there no more. What's done is done. You makin me feel bad, you makin yourself feel bad. Get yourself together so you can come through this thing in good shape.

IRENE

(*removes a record from a bag*)

In that Philadelphia where I live ... there's this African-American something or other ... on the corner. It's these kids on the poverty dung ... program ... poverty program they call it.

TEDDY

I don't need no poverty program ... I need a prosperity program.

(*sets up record player*)

This my present?

IRENE

One of em. Kids hang out round this poverty program ... seventeen, eighteen ... wearin alla that *yaller* and red African print. Once a lady took care-a me when I was a child ... mama off workin ... Woman wouldn't let me

wear a red hair ribbon. She say ... "You too black to wear red. Dark people oughtta wear dark clothes."

(*laughs*)

Them poverty program kids wearin red and green and orange. Round the corner from my house ... a soul-brother got a shop sellin Africa ... you can *buy* Africa ... robes, dresses, sandals, beads, mats, baskets, drums ... every kinda Africa.

TEDDY

Mosta that stuff made in England. Whitey is gettin rich offa us wearin that mess ...

IRENE

He gettin rich offa everything else we wear too ... Also offa what you eat, drink, the liquor, wine, beer ... the cameras, he gettin rich off all of it.

TEDDY

Whitey is still trickin you. They own Africa factories. They turnin out statues and robes and incense by the billion.

IRENE

Maybe they trickin theyself. Suppose you only had a few months to live, Teddy. What would you do? How would you spend the time?

TEDDY

I'm not gonna help you play them games. What kinda talk is that?

IRENE

Suppose you had a month to live? Suppose you had a year?

TEDDY

Aw, Reenie, damn ... I'd do all the things I meant to do but been putting off.

IRENE

And if you had ten years ... twenty, thirty ... seventy-five ...? Dontcha see, Teddy, the answer is the same. No matter how long or short the time ... you oughta do all the things you mean to do. Never put it off. I discovered that all by myself while cryin in the room with yellow tile walls. The time we know is short. If you make seventy ... that'll be seventy times to spend Christmas Day ... seventy Thanksgivings ... seventy chances to see springtime ... Teddy, don't put off anything you want to do until later. Ain't no later. Later for later. It's all now.

TEDDY

(*plays record*)

What I wanta do right this minute ... is whatever you wanta do.

IRENE

(*opens box and takes out African robes and book*)

I bought some of Africa in that shop. A robe for you and one for me.

TEDDY

(*a bit uncomfortable*)

Mmmmm, er ... well, aw, gee ... that was nice of you. Thank you very much.

IRENE

I know it don't gas you too much ... but put it on and keep me company.

TEDDY

(*puts on the robe*)

When you come outta that jive hospital ... we gonna get us some change together and take off for Africa ... so you can eyeball it for yourself.

IRENE

I ain't lost nothin in Africa.

TEDDY

For a minute I thought you was bout to dig Marcus Garvey and run out on us.

(*African record is playing*.)

Street corner speakers out here hollerin how we come from kings and queens. Hell ... everybody wasn't a king or a queen ... Who would they rule over if all was kings and queens?

IRENE

Don't talk so damn ignorant. Fact is ... you *coulda* been a king ... but you *know* you not descended from any American Presidents ... at least none of em ever claimed you

(*keeping time to the music*).

You descended from that. Look at you ... pattin your foot ... it's all in your face. This book tells how there was no orphan children in Africa ... anybody die away from their children ... or don't want em ... some other is right there to take em in and love em. I read that.

TEDDY

Yeah ... well, I read where they urinate in ditches over there in Africa, Reenie.

IRENE

So what! Slave labor built this country!

TEDDY

Right. And slave labor gonna tear it down!

IRENE

For years ... I spent eight hours out of each day in toilets ... places where I couldn't go in if I didn't work there. *They* piss all over the pink toilet seats! Ditch or marble floor ... piss is piss.

TEDDY

Some-a them Africans sold us to the white folks, Reenie.

IRENE

(*passing a box to him*)

Salt peanuts?

(*He opens the box*.)

Some-a the niggers over here still sellin each other out ... and robbin and muggin and hittin on the head and ransackin ...

(*significantly*)

and also *racketeerin* ...

TEDDY

Signify ... go ahead ... but I don't go to anybody's damn house and say ... yall just gotta play the numbers ... do I do that?

IRENE

Ain't just you. I done my share, you done yours and some did even worse. Holdin down your own people ... for what?

TEDDY

For the money, that's what, When I run a game it's *racketeerin* ... When New York State run a game it's patriotic. They can even put ads in the paper ... BUY YOURSELF A LOTTERY TICKET ... And when you ride the bus they got pitchers of people laughin and grinnin cause they had a hit. But they throw me in jail for takin a ten-cent bet. I served time twice ... yes, I did ... so hush the hell on up and listen to your damn African music. Git offa my back. Reenie ... that's one thing bout that simple Berniece ... she make you feel like a man. She's white, but she make you feel like ...

IRENE

Feel like ... feel like ... I been hearing that all my days ... sound like my poppa ... "I wanta *feel like* a man." You wanta be a man ... forget that *feel like ... feel like* ... Fix me another drink.

TEDDY

If you wasn't on your way to the hospital I'd knock the hell out of you, for underminin me. Berniece knows how to make you feel pleasant.

IRENE

You ain't had to watch her rinse out her last pair of raggy drawers ... or pull garbage ... Y'all busy poppin champagne by candlelight ...

TEDDY

Yeah, yeah, yeah, you the best.

(*putting away bottles*)

Bar shut down ... before the joint gets outta control.

IRENE

(*near tears*)

Oh, Lord, God ... what is it all about? Suppose my girl is in jail on accounta the civil rights? Suppose she's out in the demonstration bein beat? God oughtta kill me for my sins!

(*waves book at him and throws it to him*)

I want you to have my Africa book. Know what they do with dice in Africa? They tell fortunes, read the future ... call it rollin the bones ... then they read what they rolled for you. Here they shoot dice to get at each other's rent money!

(*She takes off her dress and unfolds her African robe to put it on*).

TEDDY

(*takes out dice ... rattles them and throws on the floor*)

I told you I was a seventh child. Gotcha fortune right here.

(*picks up, warms them in his hand ... throws again*)

Six ... six is my point ...

IRENE

(*takes a roll of money out of her bosom*)

Yeah? I got fifty that say you don't six. Nother fifty say you'll ten fore you crap out.

TEDDY

No you don't ... put your money back in the bank ... I'm tellin *fortune* this evenin ... no gamblin ... just fortune.

(*surveying her robe*)

Damn ... don't she look pretty.

(*throws dice*)

Two spots ... snake eyes lookin at you. The evil eye is always lookin but ...

(*throws dice*)

Them boxcars signify that our daughter rides in style ...

IRENE

Might could be so.

TEDDY

Six-ace ... Lord, Lord, Lord, our little girl is a winner all around ...

IRENE

You crapped out!

TEDDY

We not gamblin, baby ... all these are signs for the fortune-tellin ...

IRENE

That's right ... tell it ... I believe you ...

TEDDY

(*throws dice*)

Her days are all comin up sevens and elevens ...

(*throws dice*)

Little Joe ... that's her boyfriend ... maybe it's her husband ... her ... her ... her what you call ... guardian ...

(*throws dice*)

... But he is ... buyin them new shoes ... with a seven ...

(*throws again*)

Another seven ...

(*throws again*)

Another seven ...

IRENE

That's a streaka luck ... you hot, baby.

TEDDY

And a seven again! Our daughter is a real gone girl ... she's outta sight ... her mind is together ... her pocketbook is together ... her soul is together ...

(*He starts to throw again and IRENE grabs his hands*.)

IRENE

That's enough, don't press your luck.

TEDDY

But, baby, I was bout to read you outta the hospital and back here with me overlookin the Harlem River.

IRENE

(*puts dice in her bosom*)

That's enough. I'll keep these. I'm feelin great. I'm ready to go in that all-white room ... and let a white man in a white mask put me to sleep ... And another white man in a white suit is gonna stick a knife in me ... White dresses and white masks all around me ... And I'm laid out on a white sheet ... And they'll cut out a part of me ... I'm wonderin if they could ever trust us that much.

TEDDY

(*turns away from her a moment*)

Hey, this record is a gas. The guy is drummin his ass off. Reenie, people got to trust each other in some strange ways.

IRENE

I want somethin else black in that room ... besides me. I want a good blackness like some of the young people feel ... clean black--a blackness I never knew ...

TEDDY

Out on the coast one time ... my car broke down in this little town ... on the way to L˙ A˙ from Frisco. Didn't see a soul-brother or sister for two days. Folks were friendly in an offhand way ... but by time to go ... I needed to *see* Black ... didn't need to even *talk* to Black, just want to *see* it, see Black walkin or workin in a store ... or waitin for a train.

IRENE

(*indicating the record*)

That's what I got to take to the hospital with me ... a little of this Africa ... It'll be like a ... like a ...

TEDDY

A Mojo ... a Mojo workin for you ... yeah. Berniece say we can't go back to Africa ... that the Africans don't know us anymore.

IRENE

When Black get to longin for Black ... it bugs em. Black hate Black ... it kicks em.

TEDDY

Later ... later ... later for what she say.

IRENE

You are Africa ... Do you remember me, daddy? Will we ever love one another? If I go in that white room without some Black in my soul ... I won't make it.

TEDDY

Don't say that.

IRENE

I got to take Africa in there with me ... When they knock me out with gas or ether or whatever the hell ... I got to be hearin that drum in one corner of my mind ... so my heart can beat ...

(TEDDY *turns the record up louder*.)

TEDDY

Dance it, Reenie ... dance up on some BLACK ... Africa for Reenie!

(*She joins him in dancing. They improvise sweeping grand steps*.)

That fool Gut Wilson ... you know they say his ole lady shot him ... but he's up and out now.

IRENE

Where's he at?

TEDDY

Out tryin to hustle up a poker game for Chicago.

IRENE

Don't you go no place till I get through this that I'm goin through.

TEDDY

Not even think in bout it. Never gonna leave ... never ...

(*They continue dancing*, teddy *is overdoing the beat. stamping it out*.)

Dig the beat ... I love you, Reenie ... dig the beat ... I love you, baby ... I love you ... I love you ... I love you ... Dig the beat ... I love you ... I love you, Reenie ...

(*They continue to dance and whirl*.)

CURTAIN